



Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

Abu Dis Human Rights report

Two months in Abu Dis, March and April 2020

Palestine at the Time of Corona: the first two months



Watching a new sector of the Separation Wall being built in Sheikh Sa'ed

During these two months, March and April, the Coronavirus pandemic was escalating across the world and Palestine went into lockdown. But this was not a break from the pressures of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinians or the human rights violations resulting from the actions of the Israeli army, military and settlers on the people living in and around Abu Dis.

An account of this time shows that while Coronavirus was difficult, the effects of the Occupation were deep and often tragic.

On 5th March, the Palestinian Authority announced a lockdown, before the Israelis and well before Britain did. The PA had a firm approach to the first cases of Corona, bringing in extra Palestinian policemen to areas such as Abu Dis, stopping movement, closing schools, universities, restaurants and social gatherings of all sorts. Many

of our friends in Palestine pointed out that they were used to living in lockdown– that “closure”, “curfew” and restrictions on movement were not new to them.

Perhaps partly due to the early lockdown, partly to having a young population. Palestine did not – at least initially - have as many deaths from Corona as experienced in other parts of the world. The spread of Covid to Gaza which was dreaded as the area is so crowded was - at least at first- contained: the few people who were found to have the virus were immediately quarantined.

However, there were pressures on Palestinians beyond coronavirus. The closures that were imposed for reasons of health held back Palestinian political activity but did not stop the Israelis attacking Gaza on several occasions or developing the plans for settlement expansion in the West Bank. The Israeli army and the settlers were not

locked down and the Israeli government was encouraged to take new steps towards annexation and building in the contentious E1 area and further across Palestine, helped by the US declaration that they did not see this as a violation of international law.

Corona under occupation

Workers

As Corona began to take hold, the treatment of Palestinians by Israel illustrated deep racism. Palestinians' labour was wanted but they as people were otherwise disposable. Previously, women over 50 and men over 55 had been able to go through the checkpoints from the West Bank to

Jerusalem but this was stopped. However,

Israel needed young labourers in sectors such as building, so offered encouragement for young people of working age to enter Israel to do manual work.



Crowds at an early-morning checkpoint during Corona

Encouraging people to go to Israel to work was a point of contention with the Palestinian Authority which wanted people to stay at home under lockdown. It was very complicated for people who had little money to be pressured in all directions by the need to feed their families, fear of the illness, the Palestinian Authority trying to stop them from working and the Israelis encouraging them to work and then putting them through its complex procedures as a second-class workforce.

Workers going to Israel had to pass through checkpoints with huge crowds, queues and metal turnstiles used by thousands; this was already a risk of transferring Covid between them. They were given 'permits' on the condition that they stayed for several weeks at a time in Israel. It is hard as well as expensive for Palestinians to rent and people working on building sites for example – many of the workers - were just expected to sleep at their work places even if there were no sanitary facilities.

They were given no care or protection, and if they were found to be ill with Covid, they were taken to the checkpoints to the West Bank and dumped on the West Bank side for Palestinians to care for. In some cases people ill with other things – flu for example – were also thrown out. [This video](#) taken on 24th March 20 shows a very ill man left collapsed in the hot sun near a checkpoint, eventually rescued by a Palestinian ambulance.

Prisoners

Around 5000 Palestinian prisoners remained in Israeli jails. There were strong calls for the release of Palestinian prisoners as every aspect of prison life posed a risk of Covid. Inside there were no tests for prisoners, people lived crowded together and shared the same sanitary and other facilities. Stories spread, for example that one of the interrogators in Mus Kobia Prison had Covid and was spreading it to prisoners under investigation; that prisoners newly released to Nablus were found to have Corona. Families were very afraid for their prisoners whether children or adults. The Israelis did release some of their own criminal prisoners (not high security prisoners) but the Palestinian children, administrative detainees and others in prison had to stay there, while there were many new arrests during this time.

“Dozens of soldiers burst into our house and wanted to arrest my son. We were shocked and worried about our son. Also both I and my husband are older and we both have diabetes and we are worried about Corona. The Israeli soldiers came into our house and touched everything and came close to all of us without any masks or any way of protecting us from this disease.”

Mother of a new prisoner, Abu Dis

The economy

The Palestinian Authority had been under increased pressure since the beginning of the Trump administration and their support for Israel’s claim on the land and dismissal of the claims of Palestinians. One part of this meant that since February, Israel had withheld tax revenue on the grounds that the PA were supporting the families of prisoners and people who had been killed by Israel (a sort of social security). The result was a shortage of income, and as a result the PA - a major employer in the West Bank - paid only half salaries in these months. Meanwhile as a result of Covid, many other forms of employment just stopped, so most families had less or no income. Meanwhile Israel was controlling the market for basic needs in the West Bank, and bringing things through the checkpoints was increasingly difficult – “Prices have gone up in a crazy way.”

Inequality and apartheid

The apartheid situation in the West Bank produced different rules for Palestinians and Israeli settlers living in the same area. For example people in Bethlehem – where there was an early Covid cluster – were denied freedom of movement by an Israeli lockdown in addition to the PA controls for the Corona virus, while Israelis in the local area are free to travel on the local roads.

Palestinian people in East Jerusalem live under Israeli control as second-class ‘residents’ (not given citizenship). As Covid spread, they complained that they were unable to get care or tests from Israeli clinics. The PA tried to help Palestinian clinics

(for example one in Silwan) and hospitals (eg Muqassed), providing needed test equipment. The first consideration for the Israelis however was allowing no Palestinian Authority work within Jerusalem, so they refused to let people with Corona get treatment from their hospitals if they had had a positive test that came from the PA.

Hidden by Corona

Evidence of appalling racism

During the non-violent Palestinian demonstrations at the edge of Gaza that started two years ago in March 2018, very many Palestinians were shot and killed and very many had lost legs in those demonstrations. Early in March [an article](#) was published in the Israeli paper 'Haaretz' giving evidence that the soldiers were on purpose shooting to maim and actually making a game of counting the number of people's kneecaps that they had damaged.

A voice from Abu Dis

"They have always moved on, step by step, whenever they can. They will take Area C. But don't think Ramallah is safe. They need enough people to fill up the area then they will take Area B. The governments of the world say a lot of words but in the end they accept whatever Israel does. Will we become like the Indians of the Amazon Basin? – dispossessed and pushed around and killed with nobody noticing? Don't think that even having a state will save us. We need to make our voices louder and link with others and shout loud for our equal human rights."

Moves towards annexation

In March, the Likud party raised the issue in the Knesset of annexation of the Jordan Valley and the lands all along the east of the West Bank, which would make the most

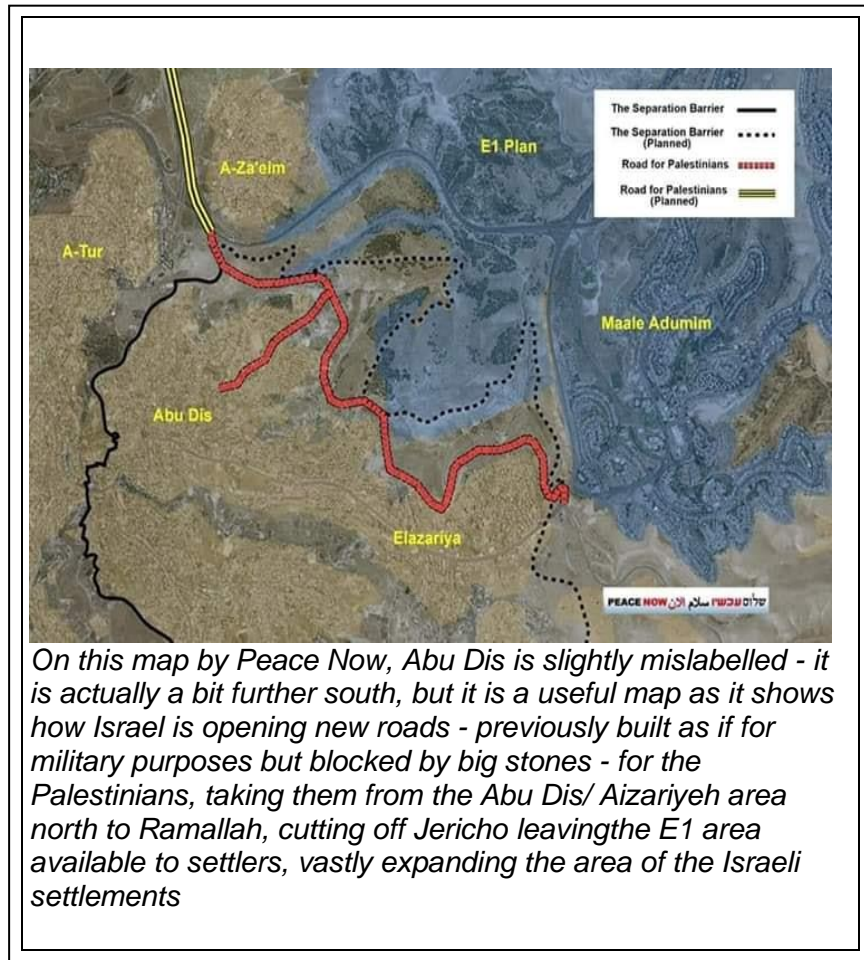
Netanyahu points to areas he plans for Israel to annexe, in the Jordan Valley and the east of the West Bank



fertile agricultural land in the West Bank part of Israel and leaving small crowded areas only for the Palestinians. Much of this land has in fact been taken over by Israeli settlements and thousands of settlers are living on the area, but formal annexation would be a new step and challenge to the international community's idea of a two-state solution.

On 3rd April, the US Foreign Minister declared that the US supported Israeli settlement building and did not consider this a

violation of international law. The Israeli government took advantage of the world's preoccupation with Corona and the clear support of the United States government to press ahead with expansion of its control in the West Bank.



Across the West Bank and Jerusalem there were increasing pressures by the Israeli army and settlers on the local Palestinians with the underlying issue being the confiscation of lands and preparation of infrastructure to expand the settlement project. Settlers attacked farmers, burned olive trees and took over some land. The army defended the settlers and controlled the Palestinians.

One area of focus for the Israeli government was the E1 area, east of Abu Dis and in the centre of the West Bank, where Israel wanted to build a vast area of settlements which would link Maale Adumim and the existing settlements to Jerusalem

and divide the West Bank. The E1 project was raised in 1994, 1997, 2009, 2014 but proved extremely controversial in the international community because it challenged the convention of 'two states'. But now encouraged by Trump's administration in the USA and with the cover of Corona, Israel gave land-confiscation orders for hundreds of donums of land, began a new section of the Separation Wall and showed clearly that the apartheid situation would be built in further by making an Israeli-only road and a Palestinian-only road.

Across Palestine in March

The Israeli army killed two Palestinians in March. Mohammed Hamayil (15) from Beita, Nablus killed during a demonstration against land confiscation in Beita. A 32-year oldman was killed at a checkpoint in Ni'lin.

In Burin village, settlers attacked houses and some children were wounded. There were attacks on olive groves in at least twenty areas across the West Bank – cutting many trees, burning trees in other places. In Beit Omar (Hebron), settlers fenced off 12 donums of Palestinian land with no military order and began to build on it.

The Israelis arrested 250 Palestinians this month, including 54 young people under 18 and six women.

This month, the Israelis destroyed 21 Palestinian houses and 18 other Palestinian buildings. In the Jordan Valley, the Israelis confiscated the building materials, an electricity generator and medical equipment which were being used to make a clinic for Corona patients.

Settlement expansion – The Israeli army confiscated 400 donums from the lands of Salfit in order to expand Ariel settlement. 596 donums were taken from Bethlehem district in order to expand Efrat settlement. The Israelis gave permission for 3500 housing units in Maale Adumim settlement near Abu Dis set to work to build a road to take Palestinians far from that area (see map). The Israeli Defence Minister said that the purpose of this road was to make the E1 area a Jewish-only area and keep the Palestinians far away.

Annexation - Netanyahu made a proposal to the Israeli Knesset to go even further, to annexe to Israel most of the Jordan Valley (leaving out Jericho) and the whole eastern section of the West Bank. There was great concern about the future of the people living there. The Palestinians in this area would become trapped second-class residents with some sort of category unlike the Israelis, who would have full civil and voting rights.

Across Palestine in April

In April 2020, three Palestinians were killed as a result of the Israeli occupation. One of them was a 23-year-old prisoner who died from lack of health treatment; one of them was a young man from Sawahreh killed at the Container checkpoint and the third was a twenty-two-year old killed on a checkpoint near Nablus.

This month, 184 people from the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza were newly arrested. Thirty-five of them were children under the age of 18.

Five Palestinian houses and fifteen commercial/ manufacturing buildings were destroyed by Israeli military order.



Picture from a car window shows Israeli soldiers enforcing a flying checkpoint for Palestinian cars on the road near MaaleAdumim settlement

Settlement expansion- The Israeli authorities took land that belonged to the Waqf around the old mosque in in Hebron and put this under the use of Israeli settlers, decided to add 1300 building units to Gilo settlement, including housing and buildings for commercial use, taking up more of the land – around the settlement – Palestinian



House demolition in Khalit Abed, Abu Dis

land in Bethlehem District. There were further land seizures around Ertas in the Bethlehem area and in the north in Nablus area.

The Israeli government approved the building of a new tramline, one from the west of the city to the Wailing Wall and the other across the city, joining the city from the west to the east.

Attacks on Gaza – There were strong calls to lift the siege and allow medical help for Gaza, particularly in the context of Corona. However, Israel did not allow this and carried out a number of attacks on Gaza fishermen and on buildings in Gaza, using unmanned drones.

In Abu Dis in March and April

Sunday 1st March- The Israelis destroyed a mobile home lived in by the family of the land owner in Khalit Abed, Abu Dis, on the west of the Separation Wall.

Thursday 5th March - Lockdown imposed by Palestinian Authority

Sunday 17th March-The Israeli army started work on a new sector of the Separation Wall in Sheikh Sa'ed, south-west of Abu Dis, putting Sheikh Sa'ed in a corridor between high security walls on on both east (between Sheikh Sa'ed and Sawahreh) and west (between Sheikh Sa'ed and Jabal al Mukabbar and Jerusalem).. This was in order to build a new road for Israeli settlers only between Har Homa settlement near Bethlehem and MaaleA dumim in the E1 area, while making sure that the road did not pass next to a Palestinian village.



Israeli army invade Abu Dis in the early hours

Monday 18th March -The Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that the planned to annexe much of the West Bank. The Israelis immediately started to make a

new road for Palestinians next to Jabal al-Baba to connect the east of Aizariyeh and Az Zayam and there linking to the road to Ramallah.

Friday 3rd April - There was a demonstration in the main street of Abu Dis, going towards the military camp. The Israeli army threw tear gas around the area.

Tuesday 7th April - Mohammed Salah and Mohammed Assad Ebadat were arrested from their houses early in the morning when the Israeli army invaded their homes in the University Street. The army shot tear gas and there were outbursts of gunfire from the time that the army arrived till late in the morning.



Mohammed Salah

Mohammed Salah was sent to the prison hospital on arrest because he was immediately ill. Two days after his arrest, the family heard that he was being held under administrative detention.

Sunday 12th April - The Israeli army put a checkpoint in front of Maale Adumim to stop movement towards Ramallah and Jericho. The checkpoint was there for nearly six hours.

Thursday 16th April - The Israeli army put a checkpoint in the same place.

Friday morning 17th April—Early in the morning, the Israeli army invaded the town and shot tear gas around the area of Ar Ras, where they entered the home of Dahoud Ahmed Jaffal, a university student, arrested and took him away.



Prisoners' Day demonstration of cars around Abu Dis

Every year, 17th April is Palestinian Prisoners' Day. In the late afternoon, there

was an event in solidarity with prisoners in Israeli jail, as It was not possible to have a demonstration on the street because of lockdown, but a procession of cars drove round the area with loudspeakers and flags calling for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Wednesday 22nd April—There was a terrible incident at the Container checkpoint near Abu Dis. A young man from Sawahreh was shot by soldiers and he bled to death. The soldiers said that he had tried to attack them with his car. We do not know the true story of what happened or what his intentions, but whatever happened was a tragedy. The Israeli soldiers kept his dead body and have not yet returned it to the family.

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